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**TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT
AS A POTENTIAL SOLUTION TO CHALLENGES
WITHIN THE CALIFORNIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**

BY

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TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AS A POTENTIAL SOLUTION TO CHALLENGES WITHIN THE CALIFORNIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

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ABSTRACT

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Impacts from the downsizing of the Army National Guard's full time workforce have presented a difficult and challenging set of problems to the leadership and managers of the California Army National Guard. Although unique in many ways, there exists many parallels to the problems experienced by other public sector agencies and organizations. This study attempts to capitalize on the organizational successes of other public agencies. Additionally, it recommends the reintroduction of Total Quality Management as a potential solution to receding organizational effectiveness, and to the recent shifting of organizational expertise to the more junior members of the workforce caused by a surge of losses at the middle management level.

Introduction

Downsizing and diminishing budgetary resources are tough business for both private and public sector managers. Flexibility once provided to managers by larger budgets and the corresponding ability to hire temporary employees to lighten the load on the permanent work force is simply no longer available in many situations. The creeping infection of employee burnout becomes pervasive, and the overall morale of the organization hits the skids.

The private sector has many options in its doctor's kit to provide remedies to ailing organizational esprit de corps. Government managers have considerably fewer. Additionally, it is more difficult for public sector managers to justify to the public why services are falling than private sector managers, dealing with their board of trustees, who have the option of forging net profit gains through efficiency measures, even during periods of falling gross revenues.

The California Army National Guard (Cal Guard), similar to so many other publicly funded agencies, is presently facing the problems of funding limitations, diminishing workforce morale and lost efficiency through the downsizing of its full time management (FTM) workforce. It is the premise of this article that the mechanisms of Total Quality Management (TQM) can provide an adequate and readily available tool to enable the Guard to get itself back on track in both areas of employee motivation and increased organizational productivity.

In pursuit of this thesis, enough of the background, geographical setting, and the current human resource situation of the Cal Guard will be included to allow the reader to understand some of the problems unique to California. This will be followed by an analysis of employee motivation, a look at how TQM may best solve some of the Cal Guard's unique problems, and a discussion of how the Cal Guard can avoid repeating some past problems in the reintroduction of

TQM into its system. Some recommendations for further study will be offered in the concluding remarks.

In researching public sector application of TQM, the author came across an article written by Steve Cohen titled “Project-Focused Total Quality Management in the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.”¹ The parallels of the human resource problems and dwindling financial resources experienced by New York City’s Parks and Recreation Department (NYCDPR) and many predominant challenges facing the leadership and administration of the full time manning (FTM) work force of the California Army National Guard (Cal Guard) were truly astonishing. Additionally, insights about why earlier attempts to implement TQM in the Cal Guard had failed to deliver widespread integration and permanence were also included in this article. Based on this finding, the author has felt compelled to expand the scope of the original analysis to include not only the motivational aspects of TQM in the public sector, which remain important, but also take a practical look at how methodologies used by NYCDPR could offer the Cal Guard a viable, effective, off the shelf, program.

To save a great deal of space in this limited work, the author presumes the readers to have a basic understanding of the fundamentals of TQM.² Expansive definitions of the TQM process have, consequently, been omitted.

A note as to the envisioned target audience should be included. Beyond the original purpose of developing a research paper, it is intended that this information be shared with selected members of the senior leadership of the California Army National Guard. Some are proponents of the TQM process. Some are not. All of those intended to review this information are accomplished, experienced leaders with ample time spent “in the trenches.” They are realistic

and thick skinned enough to weather the tough self analysis necessary to acknowledge the soft spots left over from poor decisions and ineffective policy that accompany even the best of careers (certainly the author's included).

The Situation of the California Army National Guard

Some problems facing the Cal Guard are not necessarily unique in nature but are in magnitude. This is due to the size of the State and the size of the troop strength compared with other state's Guard units. Challenges facing the Cal Guard can be grouped into the categories of geographical dispersion, personnel turnover, downsizing and budget reductions. A more recent and troubling phenomena is the transition of the experience base from management to the lower levels of the organizational structure.

The span of control of typical Army Guard organization within California is significant. Battalions³ are typically formed with from four to eight armories with separation between the most distant armories averaging over 100 miles. Sometimes this exceeds 400 miles. Management of the daily, routine operations are conducted largely by telephone or through reporting procedures, out of simple economic necessity. The organizational structure and geographical separation themselves are surmountable problems. They have, however, the strong tendency to amplify other organizational challenges and need to be recognized before further defining the more significant human resource problems.

The Cal Guard is losing its experienced middle managers. Turnover of the experienced middle management segment of Cal Guard's full time structure is primarily caused by three factors. A significant number of the senior Active Guard Reserve (AGR)⁴ personnel that converted to active duty in the early 1980's and are now coming up on their 20-year service,

retirement. This loss is currently compounded by the 15-year, early out retirements being offered. As the pressures inherent with downsizing build, more middle managers, majors and lieutenant colonels, have accepted the early out option. Senior management, with the typically limited number of options at their disposal to encourage overworked and frustrated middle managers to stay on, have been largely unable to retain them.

A third problem is the effects of the downsizing of the overall FTM workforce. Like many other public organizations the Cal Guard has taken its share of hits. Overall full time manning has taken a drop from its 1990 high of approximately 1,300 to its currently required ceiling of 900.⁵ That's a 30 percent reduction of full time personnel in a five year period. This needs to be compared to only a 17 percent reduction in the total California Army Guard strength approximately 24,000 down to 20,000 to which the FTM personnel provide services. Although the FTM reduction has occurred strictly from attrition, and the worker anxiety of a reduction in force has not been present, the impacts of such a structural reduction are significant. The primary effect is worker burnout. The "signs that employees are frazzled: lack of motivation, pronounced negativity, loss of creativity . . ."⁶ are increasingly prevalent throughout the Guard's FTM workforce. As intimated above, burnout has been a significant yet reluctantly recognized reason for acceptance of employee turnover and early retirement at the junior and mid-management level. It should be noted that this is only the author's opinion. It is, however, based on personal knowledge of a number of the departing managers. The cause of burnout is simple. Senior level leadership has been either unwilling or unable to establish priorities of effort (reduce the scope of work), better tailored to the resource available to accomplish it. The result is simply too few people trying to do too much work. This further results in the arbitrary

selection of tasks not to complete, simply running out of time to complete all requirements, or completing all tasks to a greatly reduced standard. This is not to say, however, that greater levels of efficiency cannot be accomplished with existing resources. TQM may offer one part of a two-part solution to this problem.

The fourth component of the Cal Guard's situation presents not only a significant challenge but perhaps its greatest opportunity. The recent loss of a significant number of middle managers is compounded by a greatly reduced budget. In the past, new managers were able to attend skill enhancement schools. Sending a newly hired captain or major to two, or even three schools annually during their first few years on the job was common. This education would lead to a more even balance of technical expertise between the enlisted workers and the junior and mid level managers. Through these classes the new managers were quickly brought up to speed with the technical and professional knowledge required to supervise the more tenured, enlisted force. With the budget reductions, however, the ability to send new managers to multiple schools has ended. A newly hired full time manager will be lucky to attend a single professional development course in his or her first two years. Junior officers are largely left with the traditional style of technical education -- learning from their NCO's. In a very short period this process concentrates the technical and administrative expertise within the more junior levels of the organization.

Full Time Manning officer rotation in the National Guard system further compounds this problem. It is unlikely that an FTM officer will spend more than three years, often two, at one organization before rotation. Enlisted soldiers and NCO's can, and typically do, spend the bulk of their early careers (PVT to SFC) in one organization.

It is in this last component of the Cal Guard's situation that some amazing parallels exist between the author's experience with the Guard workforce and the challenges faced by Frederick W. Taylor as he was developing his *Principles of Scientific Management* written in 1911. "Systematic underworking" (interestingly enough called "soldiering" by Taylor) is caused by a deliberate attempt by laborers to keep management from knowing how fast certain tasks can be done or how much work should be done in a day. This was primarily caused in the days of Taylor because the skills and technical knowledge of how to accomplish work was largely held in the minds of the tradesmen (the parallels begin to grow). It was the responsibility of management to induce the workers to use his best methods and knowledge (his ingenuity) to do his best work for his employer by providing the incentive of wages or some special means of bonus or premium pay (incentive). This old style of management that Taylor struggled with, in his early days as a manager in the steel industry, was known as the "ingenuity and incentive" style of management. As a young manager himself, Taylor experienced great conflict caused by this old management style. Two factors caused this. First, management didn't know how the job should be done or what constituted a full days work. Second, it was not in the best interest of the workers to let management know what a full days work truly was, for fear of management making them work up to full productivity. This, in turn, would eliminate their ability to practice systematic underworking, or soldiering.⁷

This is the core of the parallel. Technical expertise and continuity within the Cal Guard's workforce will continue to concentrate at the lower levels. Middle management will continue to shrink disproportionately in response to retirements and downsizing. The success of the system has, and will become increasingly more dependent on fewer, more inexperienced managers

trying to induce more work from a more stable, technically knowledgeable, wiser (and more exhausted) labor force. Add to this 24 years of the author's experience that has shown that no one can "soldier" (systematically underwork) better than soldiers, if not properly motivated by experienced leaders.

Taylor had three options to revive productivity. They included increasing the size of the management force, narrowing the scope of responsibility of each manager, and shifting of one third to one half the work done by labor to management⁸. Despite the appropriateness of the technique for Taylor's time, these options are simply unavailable to the modern day public sector manager. Maximization of use of the technical expertise at all levels of employment, and particularly the lower levels for the reasons stated above, will be essential to the long term success of the California Army National Guard. The trick will be how to accomplish this. A method may be TQM.

Motivation and the Public Sector Employee

In an environment such as the one faced by the California Army National Guard, the process of motivating employees becomes extremely difficult given the limited means available to the public sector manager (and the National Guard leader). A look into some classical distinctions and some current methods of motivation yields some potential answers.

Extrinsic rewards that the private sector can apply, such as profit sharing, employee stock option plans, sabbaticals (outside education), incentive vacations, premium pay and bonuses, to name a few, are generally not available to the public sector manager as inducement for higher levels of performance and motivation.⁹ Extrinsic rewards in government have generally been limited to wages and the possibility of promotion.

Intrinsic rewards then, become the primary prescription available to the public sector managers to use to cure ailing individual and organizational motivation. Fourteen of the top twenty techniques Shari Caudron identifies to motivate employees are intrinsic rather than extrinsic methods.¹⁰ Ten of her motivational methods mentioned below very nearly reflect the basis for most TQM programs:

- Give employees the information they need to do a good job.
- Provide regular feedback.
- Ask employees for their input. Involve them in decisions that affect their job.
- Establish easy-to-use channels of communication.
- Learn from the employees themselves what it is that motivates them.
- Write personal notes to them about their performance.
- Publicly recognize employees for good work.
- Include morale-building meetings that celebrate group success.
- Give them a good job to do.
- Have the tools available to do their best work.¹¹

Edward E. Lawler makes a significant point when he discusses the subtle but important differences between motivation and satisfaction. Motivation is “determined by forward-looking perceptions” regarding work and potential rewards. Satisfaction, on the other hand is based on “peoples feelings about the rewards they have received.”¹² The distinction between these two factors can easily be incorporated into the TQM process. Regarding forward-looking needs peculiar to motivation, collective goal setting as part of the initial team building process of TQM is the solution. A further distinction regarding satisfaction is necessary, however, if techniques of reward are to successfully lead to employee satisfaction.

The idea of satisfaction through reward is further articulated by the Federal Quality Institute in their discussion of skill-based rewards versus performance-based rewards. Skill-based rewards are used to “recognize individuals’ knowledge, skills and abilities and are tied to expanded capability and flexibility”¹³ of the individuals. The Army system of rewards for

individual performance is extensive and easily adaptable to support skill-based rewards within the TQM model. Performance-based rewards are more typically achievement or result-based awards given to both individuals and groups. These types of awards also exist in the Army inventory, but fall short in adequately supporting small group performance that is central to the TQM model. As with skill-based awards, individual performance award adequately exist in the Army system. Some research into existing, successful performance-based rewards for groups, however, would need to be accomplished to cover shortfalls in the existing military system.

Undoubtedly, many successful examples already exist.

Several current authors strongly reinforce the team concept of motivation. For example, Nancy K. Austin, a management consultant and coauthor of *A Passion for Excellence*, promotes the idea of creating teams, equipping them for success and “getting out of the way” to preserve “passionate commitment” and reduce the stifling effects of over supervision.¹⁴ This idea capitalizes on an intrinsic method of motivation readily available to the public sector manager and directly supports the processes central to TQM. Additionally, Al Chen and Roby Sawyers advocate the empowering advantages of social motivation. They discuss the employment of the team concept of TQM at the Internal Revenue Service. Chen states “using innovative incentive systems in conjunction with teamwork can boost morale and motivate employees to enhance service quality while reducing cost.”¹⁵

In relation to the motivational capabilities identified by TQM advocates, the current state of the Cal Guard’s full time middle management (junior leaders) needs to be taken into consideration. When stressed by the events of a routine day, let alone frequent, more stressful emergencies, it is easy for all but the best junior leader to become overcome by events. In these

situations one of the first capabilities that fall by the wayside is the proper and thoughtful application of positive motivation extended to the subordinate workforce. Institutionalizing the inherent motivational characteristics of TQM into across the board organizational Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) would allow senior managers the ability to ensure a more uniform application of motivational methodologies to the workforce while they are rebuilding and training the mid level management core. This rebuilding process can easily extend from two to three years leaving the potential for difficult motivational problems without some type of broadly applied methodology.

Addressing the Cal Guard's Challenges with TQM

Beyond the challenge of providing a standardized method of motivation for the workforce, TQM must address the other pressing problems of the Cal Guard if it is to become a cost effective and viable effort. Consequently, it is important to analyze the ability of TQM to deal with the effects of employee burnout and its ability to provide a possible solution to the trending shift of expertise from middle management to the more subordinate levels of employees.

It has been the author's experience that employee burnout is not an easy issue for military leadership. The first step in dealing with employee burnout is admitting its existence. Step two is realizing that it is best resolved by taking calculated and judiciously applied actions to counteract it, rather than disavowing its existence and hoping it will go away. The third step is acknowledging that it cannot be solved by centralized thinking or planning. The impossible task, from a centralized decision making standpoint, is to determine what the problem is. This is not a one or several part problem. Literally hundreds of largely independent, localized issues impact differently on nearly as many individuals. It is the ideal type of problem for resolution by

decentralized analysis, identification and solution. Sounds like a problem for TQM.

The fact that TQM contains motivational characteristics that are most likely missing in the presence of employee burnout can be used for its immediate positive influence (Machiavelli would be proud). The identification of problems associated with burnout, with participation from all levels of the organization, will best assure the proposed solutions will be tailored to the local environment. Early success in resolving some of these initial team projects can lead to a quick sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, and help the team to gain the necessary momentum required in solving the more complex issues of organizational effectiveness.

The problem of diminishing expertise in the middle management ranks of the Cal Guard's full time workforce is not academic. It is real. Given another Los Angeles type riot, or another Northridge size earthquake somewhere in California, the negative implications of this trend on the Guards ability to respond could be measurable and potentially costly. Worse, the causes of these impacts are largely unrecognized or at best little understood. Leadership is struggling with the consequences and symptoms of this development and not taking any observable effort to solve the root problem. This is certainly not to say it is an easy one to solve.

The trend of concentration of technical expertise in the subordinate ranks is most likely irreversible due to the manning limits (ceilings) being placed on current force structure. A fundamental and conscious decision needs to be made. Do we put the strength of the workforce where the work is, and encourage them to provide quality control with work? Do we more fully staff the middle management ranks for quality control purposes and continue to overwork an already stressed labor pool, risking continued burnout and high turnover? Common sense should dictate the former. Strong influences will fight the loss of the more senior ranking personnel as

traditional (part time) Guard commanders struggle to maintain their senior full time personnel, perceived by them as essential to cover their needs in tactical and command post exercises that have more recently become major report card items. This will be further compounded by the pressure from downsizing to centralize efforts. The natural instinct is to pull resources to the higher levels to serve as experts at large, rather than pushing resources out to the work source, the line unit level.

Even with the prudent decision to place the proper numerical emphasis on subordinate personnel versus sustaining the present number of middle managers, the current system of maximizing the value of the technical knowledge and expertise of our well trained enlisted and NCO personnel would remain largely non-standardized. *If greater dependence on the expertise and ingenuity of our junior personnel is not accomplished by design, it is destined to occur by default* (author's italics). The corresponding results will be haphazard and ineffective. Throughout the system will be a few glowing examples of brilliantly performing organizations where the raw material and leadership for the application of sound management principles exist. Unfortunately, there will many more examples of organizations that, lacking the basic resources and knowledgeable managers, will struggle at mediocre or substandard levels of performance. This is where the NCO's and enlisted FTM employees will gradually become more efficient at Frederick Taylor's ingenuity and initiative game and invariably perfect the methods of "systematic soldering," as unit commanders pull their hair out trying to figure out what is wrong. TQM provides an off the shelf solution to the oft-spoke objective of powering-down. In the past, powering-down was a popular notion. It is now a fundamental necessity for the long term health and efficiency of the California Army National Guard System.

Lessons Learned in TQM Implementation

The Cal Guard is no stranger to the TQM process. Several pilot programs have been started and have achieved varying levels of success. Most of the programs familiar to the author were large scale, complex, top driven initiatives and have not been largely effective (if even completed). None have been successful in institutionalizing the TQM process within the system. This provides us with a rare, tongue-in-cheek, counter example to the popular proverb "all government programs are doomed to success."¹⁶

In addressing the problems of getting TQM off the ground Steven Cohen offers the following:

"Unfortunately many organizations start TQM with what we call big-ticket items . . . requiring cooperation from a number of organizational units and often reallocation of equipment and resources. These projects look attractive on paper, but they are not the types of projects to take on in the initial stages of learning TQM."¹⁷

Target, cease fire -- as they say in the armor community. The problem identified by Cohen is right on target as to the past application problems of TQM in the Cal Guard. Cohen further states that these "big-ticket items" mistakenly reinforce the notion that TQM is for special projects rather than routine work. That, rather than becoming a part of the solution, they become another major requirement to compete with existing work. Cohen suggests starting with small scale projects that can deliver quick team gratification plus immediate, positive results. "It is possible to produce quick victories and savings that more than justify resources allocated to learning TQM."¹⁸ Cohen also talks about another principle of starting small that reinforces a notion central to the military style of learning. That is the notion of learning by doing. With current limited funding available for grandiose, centralized training programs, the learn by doing concept has increased merit.

A final and important point brought to light in the study of the New York City Parks and

Recreation Department's application of TQM is the importance of integrating TQM into an organization's SOP. "TQM must permeate the organization's SOP, values and culture if it is to be effective--it cannot stand alone."¹⁹ Cohen speaks strongly against the development of separate offices, programs, or SOP's. It is essential that TQM be fully integrated in the routine culture and processes of an organization to succeed. This should happen to the extent that it should become virtually invisible to the organization.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is the principal conclusion of this investigation that the California Army National Guard should take swift action to implement a program to give structure to the increasing dependence on the growing concentration of technical expertise and experience at the subordinate levels of its workforce. Further, this trend will become irreversible under current and anticipated manning constraints. This growing dependency will assume a life of its own, with potentially devastating consequences, if not properly managed.

TQM provides a viable, off the shelf methodology, with demonstrated applicability to the public sector. This system can be used to give urgently needed form to the enhanced use of the essential knowledge and skills possessed by the Cal Guard's emerging workforce structure. It should be implemented system wide across the California Army National Guard with special care and attention given to the lessons learned by the NYCPRD regarding starting small and learning by doing.

The positive, motivating characteristics available through TQM that focus on and combat worker burnout must be complemented with a deliberate program by the senior leadership to establish and express clear priorities of effort. To be effective these priorities must reflect what

will no longer be required, as well as what must be required. This process of task prioritization can, and should, also be part of the TQM process.

To achieve ultimate, long term success in this process the following additional actions should be taken. A standardized and easily applied method of quantitative analysis should be identified from the many existing methods. This method should be trained and used at all levels of the organization to document progress from the outset of the program. Additionally, the California Civil Service Employees bargaining unit should be brought in at the outset of the planning process, and certainly before the implementation of any program. California National Guard Civil Service Employees will be equally affected by this program. The initial efforts of a TQM program would be devastated by a court injunction brought against the Cal Guard leadership for the simple lack of early consideration of the Union and its membership.

Prudent use of the talents of the junior work force in the Cal Guard is no longer an option. It is a necessity. It is up to the senior leadership to devise and implement managerial strategies that both acknowledge and respond to recent trends and maximize the use of diminishing resources over the long term. The application of TQM will not be a cure-all for the California Army National Guard's current challenges. Nevertheless, it would be a timely, flexible and efficient tool if properly and prudently administered.

Notes:

1. Steven Cohen and William Eimicke, "Project-Focused Total Quality Management in the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation," *Public Administration Review* 54, no. 5 (1994): 450-456.
2. The author used three primary references for establishing the baseline for the TQM process. These are *Total Quality: An Executive's Guide for the 1090's*, Ernst and Young, 1990, *Implementing Total Quality Management: Competing in the 1990's*, Jablonski, 1991, and *Employee Involvement and Quality Management in the Federal Government*, Federal Quality Institute, 1993.
3. The following explanation is provided for readers not familiar with either general military structure or the particular structure of the California Army National Guard's full time manning. A battalion is the lowest level of organization with a staff, and has a FTM structure of about 5 to 6 full time employees including the first level of middle management -- normally one major and one captain or lieutenant. It normally locates its headquarters together with its Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) which is staffed full time with a senior NCO and from three to five more junior enlisted personnel. A typical HHC supports a total strength of about 250 to 300 total (full time and part time) Guardsmen. Outlying, company armories are typically staffed with two full time employees, a Sergeant First Class, Readiness NCO and a Staff Sergeant, Supply NCO. These two full time employees typically support company strengths of 100 to 150 depending on the type of the company (i.e., Infantry, Transportation, etc.). Three or four Battalions are typically grouped under Major Subordinate Commands (usually a brigade headquarters). Full time manning for a brigade headquarters is under review for significant reduction to five, down from the nine to eleven personnel available prior to recent downsizing. The State Army Guard structure also has five Major Commands (MACOMS) of largely varying size that command and control the various brigade level organizations and report to the State's senior headquarters, The Office of The Adjutant General. Overall, approximately (650) full time Army National Guardsmen and women support over (20,000) total Guard strength throughout the State.
4. AGR (full time) personnel are on federal active duty under U.S.C., Title 32 authority. They are funded by the federal government but serve the governors of the states unless federally activated by the President under U.S.C, Title 10, in federal emergencies.
5. This figure includes Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) predominant in deployable Guard units. Currently there are four typical categories of full time employment: AGR (Title 32 active duty); State Active Duty (State funded active duty replicate); exempted, GM, WG and GS, Federal Civil Service; and Additional Duty, Special Work (ADSW) that is paid for out of the various operating budgets. ADSW personnel are M-Day (part-time) Guardsmen/women that augment the full time workforce. Their tours can be as short as a few days to near full time employment through contiguous 179 day tours.

6. Gillian Flynn, "For Your Information: Companies Can Become Lean and Mean--But at What Price," *Personnel Journal* 73, no. 10 (Oct 1994): 22.
7. Frederick W. Taylor, "Principles of Scientific Management," cited in *Scientific Management*, forward by Harlow S. Person, (New York: Harper and Row, 1947), 15- 41.
8. Ibid., 92-102.
9. Nancy K. Austin, "Motivating Employees Without Pay or Promotions," *Working Woman* 19, no. 11 (Nov 1994) 17-18.
10. Shari Caudron, "The Top 20 Ways to Motivate Employees", *Industry Week* 244, no. 7 (Apr 1995) 12-18.
11. Ibid.
12. Edward E. Lawler III, *High-Involvement Management*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986) 32.
13. Federal Quality Institute, *Employee Involvement and Quality Management in the Federal Government*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993) 9.
14. Austin, 17.
15. Al Y. S. Chen and Roby B. Sawyers, "TQM at the IRS," *Journal of Accountancy* 178, no. 1 (Jul 1994) 77-80.
16. Richard W. Beckner, Ph. D., Quotation taken from GOV 523 Class Lectures, Shippensburg University (July 1995).
17. Cohen, 451.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid, 452.

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